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The situation in the Middle East

Measures to eliminate international terrorism

Identical letters dated 17 December 2002 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

Israel's campaign of terrorism is continuing, taking dozens of innocent lives of Palestinian civilians in horrifying criminal attacks of indescribable cruelty. Matters have reached the point where Israel has expanded the scope of its terrorist activity, leading, over the last few weeks, to the killing of four international officials of United Nations bodies working in the occupied Palestinian territory. The number of victims of the state terrorism practised by Israel in full view of the world is approaching 2,000, most of them Palestinian women, children and old people.

Israel, instead of recognizing that the actions of the Palestinians in self-defence and in defence of their territory result from its continuous occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip for over 35 years, in a situation in which there is absolutely no hope of achieving a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, is instead engaged in a deliberate policy of distortion of facts and exploitation of current international events in order to consolidate its occupation of Arab territories through the building of settlements, confiscation of Arab lands and destruction of homes in Palestinian towns and villages, resulting in the exile of hundreds of innocent Palestinians. The statements made by the Secretary-General over recent weeks and months and his condemnation of the Israeli practices reflect the magnitude of the tragedy and destruction being inflicted on the Palestinian people. At the same time, Ms. Catherine Bertini's report has now given a clear picture of the scope of the humanitarian disaster afflicting the Palestinian people as a result of the policies of blockade and repression practised by Israel in the occupied territory.

In order to conceal its crimes and evade its responsibilities, Israel, in letters addressed to the Secretary-General and to the President of the Security Council, has made sweeping accusations against the Syrian Arab Republic and other Arab States, under the excuse that some Palestinian factions located in these countries are issuing

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statements about their activities of resistance to the Israeli occupation. Israel has created a link between the statements made by these factions in some Arab States and its allegations that these States are financing and supporting the activities being carried out by the Palestinians. The Syrian Arab Republic wishes to reaffirm in this respect that what is most damaging to the international efforts to combat terrorism is Israel's murder of Palestinians and crushing of their desire for freedom under the excuse of combating terrorism, because Israel is ending any hope of achieving a just and comprehensive peace and security for all in the Middle East region and throughout the world.

In response to the distortions appearing in the letters sent by Israel (circulated as documents A/57/592-S/2002/1224, of 7 November 2002, and A/57/615-S/2002/1260, of 15 November 2002), the Syrian Arab Republic wishes once again to make the following clarifications:

1. The Palestinian offices in the Syrian Arab Republic are only information offices which are exercising their right to report on the sufferings and aspirations of the Palestinian people. We wish to point out that there are about half a million Palestinian refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic, who were expelled from their villages and towns by Israel, and who are not being allowed to return to their territory as required by international humanitarian law and the relevant United Nations resolutions. It is obvious that the staff of the offices which the Palestinian factions maintain in the Syrian Arab Republic and other parts of the Arab world cannot carry out actions against Israel, because they are far from the territory in which these actions are taking place.

2. The office of the Islamic Jihad and other offices of other Palestinian factions carry out purely informational activities, and the staff who work in them have no links with military activities or with the preparation of any operations.

3. The Syrian Arab Republic has repeatedly clarified that the Palestinian presence in its territory is temporary, until the conditions exist for all the Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and property and exercise their legitimate right to establish their independent State in their national territory. These refugees hope to return to their country as soon as possible, as provided by the legitimate international resolutions, and in the first place General Assembly resolution 194 (III), of 1948.

4. Israel's aggressive practices, and its continuous occupation of Arab territories, as well as its flagrant violations of human rights, are the reason why the Palestinians have stepped up their legitimate struggle to achieve their freedom and independence. The recent operation carried out in Hebron took place in occupied territory, in an occupied city, and was directed against occupying soldiers, and the instructions to its organizers did not originate from the information offices which exist in some Arab capitals.

5. The organizers of Palestinian operations are in the actual area of operations, in occupied territory. It is therefore logical that the Palestinians living in the Syrian Arab Republic cannot plan operations that take place in Palestinian territory because they are removed from the situation, in both geographical and operational terms.

6. The international community must make it clear to Israel that brute force will not succeed in crushing the aspirations of every Palestinian to freedom — aspirations which are backed by international legitimacy and the international community — and will not provide the security it desires, and that the solution lies

in it putting an end to the killing of children, women and old people, the building of settlements, the perpetuation of racist colonialist practices, the occupation of Arab territories, the confiscation of land, the destruction of houses and the uprooting of trees, and instead complying with the provisions of international law and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, especially Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the principle of land for peace and the Arab peace initiative approved by the Arab summit conference held in Beirut, as the only way to ensure peace and stability in the region.

7. As to the references to the Syrian Arab Republic appearing in the letter dated 11 December 2002 addressed to the Secretary-General by Israel (A/57/642-S/2002/1347), they are untrue and do not even merit a response, since their fundamental objective is to tarnish the image of the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon, in accordance with Israel's usual practice of distorting facts and confusing international public opinion. The Syrian Arab Republic wishes to reaffirm in this respect that Lebanon, which has recovered most of the territories occupied by Israel for more than 20 years, is merely exercising its functions as an independent and sovereign country. It is proof of the futility of the Israeli allegations that both the Arab summit conference and the summit conference of French-speaking countries were held recently in Lebanon, thereby demonstrating that the States of the world have respect for Lebanon and the positions it upholds.

I should be grateful if you would have this letter circulated as a document of the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session, in relation to agenda items 36 and 160, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Mikhail **Wehbe**
Permanent Representative